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May 24, 2005

The Honorable Joe Barton  
Chairman  
Committee on Energy & Commerce  
2109 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Joe:

I congratulate you on your outstanding efforts to reclaim for taxpayers the analog TV spectrum. While spectrum allocation policy falls entirely within the jurisdiction of your committee, your success in enacting a hard deadline will carry significant benefits for America's homeland security. I'm proud to co-sponsor your bill and hope that you will call on me if I can offer any assistance in this effort.

While serving on the Energy and Commerce Committee, I came to appreciate the massive cost to our economy of devoting prime spectrum to its least efficient use--a duplicate broadcast signal. In contrast to declining viewer interest in over-the-air television, phenomenal growth in demand for new wireless services suggests that consumers have suffered greatly from this government-imposed shortage of communications bandwidth.

As Chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security, I have come to fully appreciate the much greater cost--measured in lives lost--when first responders are not able to communicate at the scene of a terrorist attack. In numerous discussions with police officers and firefighters from around the country, they have made it clear to me that their top priority is establishing interoperable communications, and that the return of the analog TV spectrum is critical to this effort.

I understand from press accounts that some Members advocate a DTV transition financed by the federal government. I'd like to suggest a better alternative. Let the marketplace handle it.

The Honorable Joe Barton

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Since we have traditionally not asked taxpayers to cover the cost of televisions for even the neediest of consumers, it stands to reason that taxpayers should not be asked to cover the cost of an upgrade. More generally, this seems to be an odd moment to subsidize television, given the constant communication from so many of our constituents on the negative impact of TV, and programming which so many Americans find objectionable.

Whatever the cost of the transition, it pales in comparison to the costs that consumers, taxpayers and the economy continue to bear while government policy fences off the most valuable spectrum for all but one favored use. From the standpoint of both homeland security and pro-consumer competition in the new economy, your legislation--and a market-based solution to the task of spectrum allocation--is by far the best course for our nation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Chris", written over the word "Sincerely,".

Christopher Cox  
U.S. Representative

CCC:jbf